

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13

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R 281832Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4270

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 0435

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, GY

SUBJECT: INFORMATION MINISTER AGREES TO IMPROVE PRESS TREATMENT
OF US

SUMMARY: GUYANA'S MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE HAS AGREED TO LAUNCH A "PRESS CAMPAIGN" TO IMPROVE THE IMAGE OF THE US IN GUYANA AND TO CORRECT AN IMPRESSION AMONG THE GUYANESE PEOPLE THAT GUYANA HAD BECOME ALIGNED WITH THE EAST. THE MINISTER MADE THIS COMMITMENT TO ME FEB. 25, BUT I DOUBT SHE WOULD HAVE DONE SO WITHOUT HAVING FIRST GETTING A GREEN LIGHT FROM TOP GUYANESE LEADERSHIP. HOWEVER, DESPITE WHAT I BELIEVE TO BE THE SINCERE DESIRE OF KEY GUYANESE OFFICIALS AND PROBABLY PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE US, A NUMBER OF POTENTIAL OBSTACLES TO THE PROCESS REMAIN. THESE INCLUDE THE HOSTILITY OF SOME PERSONS IN THE GOVERNMENT PARTY AND, ESPECIALLY, THE OPPOSITION, LINGERING SUSPICIONS OF THE USG, AND THE TENDENCY OF GUYANESE TO INTERPRET COINCIDENTAL OCCURRENCES, SUCH AS OF HOSTILE ARTICLES IN THE
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US PRESS, AS BEING OFFICIALLY INSPIRED. NOR DO THEIR GOOD INTENTIONS SIGNAL ANY BASIC CHANGE IN THEIR COMMITMENT TO SOCIALISM AND NON-ALIGNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. I CALLED ON MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE SHIRLEY FIELD-RIDLEY FEB. 25 TO DISCUSS US-GUYANESE RELATIONS AND TO SEEK HER COOPERATION IN INCREASING PRESS USE OF USIS MATERIAL

AND GIVING BALANCED MEDIA COVERAGE TO INFORMATION ABOUT THE US. SHE PROVIDES OVERALL GUIDANCE TO THE NEWSPAPERS AND MEDIA LINKED TO THE GOG.

2. AFTER DISCUSSING AT LENGTH THE EVOLUTION OF US-GUYANESE RELATIONS AND MORE SPECIFICALLY THE CRISIS FOLLOWING THE CUBANA AIRLINER DISASTER LAST OCTOBER, WE TURNED TO THE ANTI-US TONE OF THE PRESS DURING THE OCTOBER 1976-LATE JANUARY 1977 PERIOD. SHE SAID HUBERT JACK, MINISTER OF ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, HAD SPOKEN TO HER AFTER MY TALK WITH HIM(SEE MEMCON OF 1/31/77) AND SHE THOUGHT THAT A CHANGE HAD OCCURRED THIS MONTH. I ACKNOWLEDGED THAT PRESS TREATMENT OF THE US HAD IMPROVED. SHE SAID THAT THE BEST THING THE US HAD GOING FOR IT NOW WAS PRESIDENT CARTER'S IMAGE AS A PRESIDENT WHO EMBODIES THE TRADITIONAL VALUES OF THE US AND HIS PLEDGE TO HAVE AN "OPEN" FOREIGN POLICY. THIS WOULD HELP DISSIPATE THE SUSPICIONS THAT THE US ADHERENCE TO "POWER POLITICS," PRESSURE TACTICS, AND CLANDESTINE OPERATIONS HAD GENERATED IN RECENT YEARS.

3. I SUGGESTED THAT TO ACHIEVE THE IMPROVED RELATIONSHIP WHICH SHE AND HER COLLEAGUES SAID THEY FAVORED, THEY WOULD HAVE TO SHOW THE US IN SPECIFIC WAYS THAT THEY WERE WILLING TO WORK TOWARD THAT END. FOR EXAMPLE, THE NEGATIVE PUBLIC IMPRESSION CREATED BY HOSTILE NEWS COVERAGE OF RECENT MONTHS WOULD, IF LEFT UNALTERED, HINDER THE GOG'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS.

4. TO MY SURPRISE THE MINISTER NOT ONLY AGREED WITH ME, BUT
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SAID THAT A "PRESS CAMPAIGN" WOULD BE NECESSARY AND WOULD BE STARTED IN ORDER TO "IMPROVE THE US IMAGE IN GUYANA." (HER WORDS**) SHE SAID THIS WAS NECESSARY NOT ONLY TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE US, BUT ALSO BECAUSE MANY GUYANESE HAD GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT GUYANA HAD BECOME ALIGNED WITH THE COMMUNIST, WHEREAS THE POLICY OF THE GOG WAS THAT OF STRICT NON-ALIGNMENT.

5. WE AGREED UPON A PROCEDURE WHEREBY SHE WOULD SEND TO THE PRESS SELECTED ITEMS FROM THE USIS WIRELESS FILE. AFTER TWO WEEKS WE WOULD MEET AGAIN TO DISCUSS THE MATTER AGAIN. THE OPENING SHOT IN THE MINISTER'S "PRESS CAMPAIGN" APPEARED IN THE SUNDAY FEB. 27 GUYANA CHRONICLE (FAVORABLE STORY ON CARTER ADMINISTRATION POSITION ON RHODESIAN CHROME EMBARGO).

6. COMMENT: FIELD-RIDLEY WOULD NOT HAVE MADE THE DECISION TO BEGIN A PRO-US "PRESS CAMPAIGN" UNLESS THE MATTER HAD ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED AND AGREED UPON AT THE TOP LEVELS OF THE GOG HOWEVER, BEFORE ALLOWING OUR SKEPTICISM TO FADE, LET US OBSERVE

THE RESULTS FOR A TIME. WHAT APPEARS TO BE HAPPENING IS THAT THE GOG IS MOVING AS QUICKLY AS IT CAN TOWARD SOME IMPROVEMENT IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE US WITHOUT SACRIFICING ITS DIGNITY OR APPEARING TO REVERSE ITSELF ON BASIC POLICY QUESTIONS.

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7. THE WILLINGNESS TO DEVELOP GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE US DOES NOT MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOG IS RECEDING FROM ITS SOCIALISM, NON-ALIGNMENT, OR RELATIONS WITH COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. MOREOVER, DESPITE WHAT APPEAR TO BE THE GOOD INTENTIONS OF GUYANA'S TOP LEADERSHIP, THE RECONCILIATION WITH THE

US HAS ITS OPPONENTS WITHIN THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS (PNC) AND, MORE EMPHATICALLY, IN THE OPPOSITION PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP). AS SOON AS THE LATTER PERCEIVES A MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE BY THE GOG TOWARD THE US, IT WILL INEVITABLY ATTACK THE GOVERNMENT FOR BACKSLIDING ON ITS COMMITMENT TO SOCIALISM AND ANTI-IMPERIALISM

8. OTHER POTENTIAL OBSTACLES TO THE RECONCILAITION ARE LINGERING GUYANESE SUSPICIONS ABOUT THE FUNDAMENTAL US ATTITUDE TOWARD A SOCIALIST GUYANA, THE STILL-SMARTING FEELINGS AMONG SOME PNC POLITICANS OVER THE RECRIMINATIONS EXCHANGED LAST OCTOBER, AND STORIES IN THE US PRESS OF PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM'S ALLEGED FORMER LINKS WITH THE CIA. THE EFFORTS AT
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CONCILIATION BY WILLS AND OTHERS, NOW APPARENTLY INCLUDING
FIELD-RIDLEY, THAT I HAVE REPORTED REMAIN FRAGILE AND COULD
EASILY BE WIPED AWAY BY AN ACCIDENT, SUCH AS THE APPEARANCE
OF TWO OR THREE SEEMINGLY ANTI-GUYANA ARTICLES IN THE US
PRESS, OR BY THE EFFORTS OF THOSE IN GUYANA WHO DO NOT FAVOR
SUCH A RECONCILIATION. END COMMENT.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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To: STATE
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